Frontispiece



Courtesy : Bharat Kala Bhavan

Gangā Devi with Pūrṇa Ghaṭa

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PŪRṆA KALASA

OR

THE VASE OF PLENTY

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THE PŪRṆA KALAŚA

Pūrṇa-Ghaṭa, the Full Vase, is one of the most typical and perfect symbols of Indian art and mythology. Its names in Indian literature, according to the rich expressiveness of Sanskrit language, are Pūrṇa-Kalaśa, Pūrṇa-Ghaṭa, Pūrṇa-Kumbha, Maṅgala Kalaśa, Bhadra Ghaṭa, Chandana Kalaśa, etc.[1] The symbol has at its back a long and hoary tradition in literature, art and real life.[2]

Pūrṇa-Ghaṭa and its names

Its ritual value is so deep-rooted and ubiquitous even to this day that no religious ceremony can be performed without the installation of the Auspicious Pot. Right from the earliest times onwards it has stood through the ages in Indian civilisation as a visible symbol of the most mysterious life-forces revealed as creation, and as a popular decorative motif of beauty and auspiciousness. It has represented from

the time immemorial the plentiful effusion of nature's blessings bestowed upon man. Its form in art and ritual is the richly decorated pitcher full with water and overflowing with bunches of lotus buds, flowers and leaves. Green foliage vegitating from its mouth make it look extremely charming.

Its extension in time and space

As the highest symbol of plenitude the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa stands to be unique, used freely, though meaningfully, throughout the history of Indian art from the Śuṅga period onwards when stone and other permanent material begn to be used widely for architecture and art. It is accepted not exclusively by one creed, but is common to all religions taking birth and flourishing on Indian soil. It is "employed equally by all sects and occurs not only in India proper, but also in Farther India and Indonesia."[3] It was received as a token of auspicious beauty and welfare from India in the countries coming at one time within the orbit of her cultural expansion, and spread all over Asia and islands where influences of Indian culture were deeply felt.

Its threefold aspect

It is (1) auspicious and apotropaic, (2) embellishing and complementary, as well as (3) indicative and symbolical. "It is the emblem *par excellence* of fulness, and prosperity, of life endowed with all gifts, moral, material and spiritual. The full

blooming overflowing contents of life are comparable to the plants and foliage luxuriating from the mouth of a jar filled with the life-giving liquid."[4]

I

Ṛigvedic Antiquity or Evidence

The conception of the Pūrṇa Kalaśa was already widely known and popular as early as the *Ṛigveda* and references to it are numerous in Vedic literature. The *Ṛigveda*, III. 32.15, tells of the Overflowing Pitcher, *Ā-Pūrṇa Kalaśa*, installed as 'the emblem of divine bounty held at the disposal of the Yajamāna and symbolising an alround plenitude of possessions.'

Potions of the overflowing contents of the Vessel of Plenty are wished for all those present. As it reads out :

Overflowing is the vase of this man here (i.e. Yajamāna of the sacrifice). Glory to him.

As a bounteous pourer have I filled up the cup (*kośa*) for you all to drink.[5]

In RV. IX. 106.7, it is described as, "the abiding place of Soma full with meath."

Here, in the context, it is really the Jar of Soma. The whole Ninth Book of the *Ṛigveda* is devoted to the glorification of Soma, the Life-elixir. We know from many a passage in the *Ṛigveda* and elsewhere that an elaborate process was followed in preparing the

Soma-juice[6], and a Kalaśa[7] is invariably mentioned in connection with pressing and collecting of Soma in it. The jar into which Soma-sap rushes for storage, is called Somadhāna, Soma-receptacle (VI. 69.6; IX. 97.33)[8], and described as white, filled with milk and the shinning liquid[9]. " The foaming or the overflowing of the jar is hinted at here by the Ṛigvedic word, *āpipyāna*, i.e. streaming forth its contents."[10]

In the ritual language, a Soma-bowl was named *Dhishaṇa*[11], a word which at the same time denotes Wish or Wish-Goddess ; also according to Ludwig and Johannsen[12], a Goddess of Prosperity and Abundance. This makes, however, further clear that how the Ṛigvedic seers were fully familiar with the symbology of a(*Soma*—) pitcher which was taken to be both a symbol of plenty and representing the Goddess of Plenty conceived in it and bearing the same name. Cf. Śrī-Lakshmī and her affiliations with the Full Ewer, see pp. 9–14.

The auspicious and beautifying nature of Soma itself is emphasised in clear words :

The Soma drops bring up all felicities. (1)

Dispelling manifold mishap, giving the courser's progeny,

Yea, and the warrior steed, success. (2)

Queller of curses, mighty, with strong sway, this Pavamāna shall

Bring treasures to the worshipper. (11)
As it is effused and poured in the Jar,
Bestows all glories everywhere. (19)[13]

No doubt, Bounty and Beauty reside in it. Thus, it becomes an auspicious jar, Bhadra Kalaśa, and is invoked for manifold blessings and auspicious enjoyment :

etāni bhadrā Kalaśa kriyāma. (RV. X. 32.9)[14]

The idea of plentifulness which man aspires for projected itself in this fine emblem of pot overflowing with foliage. To a person desirous of blessings it represented a cross-section of the mythical land of exhuberance, the Elysian Paradise, for which he longs and strives with all perseverance. As it could be a message of life and prosperity for one, so also for all. In words of Coomaraswamy : "The vase of plenty... is clearly a life symbol, and the formal offering of such a vase can only be the expression of a wish that the recipient, or in general, all those present, may enjoy health, wealth and long life. The representation in art implies similarly a desired instigation by suggestion of all the vegetative energies involved in the current coneptions of well-being ; as a symbol it clearly belongs to the order of ideas characteristic of the ancient life-cults of fertility and fruitfulness."[15]

As such it is described in the *Yajurveda*[16]. "The poet conceives that there is the Kumbha or the Full

Yajurveda

Vase enshrined in the innermost secret of the womb which contains the infant, and this vase is said to be the real progenitor by the force of its inherent mysterious powers."[17]

Atharvaveda

The *Atharvaveda* makes us familiar with the name *Pūrṇa Kumbha*[18], and expands its symbology still further. The following passage presents before us the high imagery of the Pūrṇa Kumbha pulsating with buoyant life and vegetating in multifarious forms :

The Pūrṇa Kumbha is laid on Time. We behold it manifesting in various forms.

He who carries back all these worlds, is Time in the loftiest heaven.[19]

How is the space filled by luxuriance of life which comes out from unknown source ? The Full Vase reflects in attractive fashion the transmutation of non-existence into this visible creation—which itself is a sample of the manifest Plenum. But its fulness is derived from time, the Endless and Inexhaustible Flux and which forms the firm substratum of the cosmos. It is the womb which conceals within it the mystery of the birth of the cosmos.

The seer has here explained, as Dr. Agrawala says, "that an overflowing Pūrṇa Kumbha exists in the womb of Time and presides over the endless manifestations

of the eternal and powerful time process . . . . That which is in the womb of the Vase is one, invisible and individual. When it becomes 'many' (*bahudhā*, as said in the original) it manifests out and appears at its mouth. The branches and leaves on the top of the Full Vase convey beautifully the diversified urge of the creative process. They represent its infinite fulness."[20]

Worship of the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa

The symbol, however, is of transparent meaning to an initiated eye. It will be useful here to quote further from what Prof. Agrawala observes in this connection in his article :

" The conception of the human body as the Full Vase continues in Indian religious thought to this day. We still speak of the divinity as *ghaṭa-ghaṭa-vyakta*, i.e. permeating each embodied form or *ghaṭa*. In each household on every auspicious occasion the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa is established near the doorway, and in the Maṇḍapa where the marriage ceremony is performed. In each ceremony the Ghaṭa as representing the human body, or which is the same thing as the created world, is the first to be worshipped. Verses and hymns are uttered in praise of the Ghaṭa saying that Brahmā, Vishnu and Śiva reside in the bottom, belly and mouth of the Auspicious Jar.[20a]

"Clear pure water consecrated with sacred herbs and leaves is filled and decorative patterns are made

on the body of the Maṅgala Kalaśa. Worship with flowers and saffron is offered. A burning lamp filled with *grita* is put on the lid of the Kalaśa. The Vase is placed on the ground, which is artistically decorated with architectural patterns and beautiful motifs, *Alpanā* and *Māṇḍanā*. Thus installed, the Kalaśa serves as the nucleus of the ceremony.

"It is also the symbol of fertility, filled as it is, with the fecund Waters of Life. At the time of childbirth, the mother holds a Pūrṇa Ghaṭa and walks with it to the nearest well, reservoir or pool of water to offer worship, as the latter represents the bigger source of the same fecundating Waters of creative life. At this time water is taken from the well and mingled with the water in the pitcher held by the mother—a significant symbolic ceremony denoting that the life force in the Pot is being replenished from the Pūrṇam or the Plenum of cosmic life-force outside. The human body represents its limited manifestation, whereas the life-force surrounding it is boundless and measureless."[21]

In the *Atharvaveda* itself, the Full Vase now appears as a familiar earthen jar (*kumbha*) filled with water (signifying the principle of Soma in practice and common belief). In the sacrifice the pitcher was filled with Soma but the same in domestic worship was filled with water and the two were considered as of equal merit. It is invoked as enshrining in it all the

blessings and divine bounties. In the "Śālā Sūkta" [22], the hymn of benediction on the completion ceremony of a new house, uttered while entering and taking the formal possession of it, we have the earliest description of 'a complete picture of an Indian household, full with all blessings (*svasti*) and felicitous fortunes (*saubhagāya*)'. The imagery is fully evolved enumerating all the traditional motifs of an Indian household marked by plenty and prosperity ; by sturdy youths and beautiful maidens, their young sons and healthy cattle rich in milk[23]. The specific mention in the end of the Full Vase foaming forth with streams of butter and amṛita carried in the hands of the Lady of the House, the Eternal Woman, invoked as Queen of Home and its presiding deity, takes the picture to a climax :

"O fair damsel, bring hither to us the Pūrṇa Kumbha filled with streams of molten butter, blent with nectar.

Bedew these drinkers with a draught of ambrosia. May the reward of our pious works guard this dwelling." (AV. III. 12.8)

II

Full Pot in Early Art

Amongst the earliest depictions of the Full Vase in Indian art, at Bharhut we see it represented as the vegetating symbol of pot and foliage, either alone, or as a support to Goddess Gaja-

Lakshmī. In some cases in Sanchi reliefs, the goddess Śrī-Lakshmī is shown seated or standing on a lotus flower. And thus we find, as classified by Coomaraswamy,[24] the three types of the representation:

(i) The Goddess standing or seated on a lotus,

(ii) the same, but the lotus rises from a Pūrṇa Ghaṭa,

(iii) the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa alone, with a mass of lotus flowers and leaves rising from it.



Fig. 1 Bharhut.

He says : " The three types are apparently equal and synonymous symbols of abundance and it may be that the vase alone should be regarded as an

aniconic symbol of and equivalent to the Goddess herself."[25]

This may be true, as ' the aspect of the form and its mode of occurrence in the early art seems to suggest'. But the latter view of Coomaraswamy identifying Pūrṇa Ghaṭa and Śrī-Lakshmī may only be partially true. The decorative and auspicious value of the symbol in itself was quite high and well-admitted. As such it was included in the list of eight auspicious symbols, and is seen as an emblem being held by Nāgas, river-goddesses and other divinities[26], and as a finial and decorative motif, etc., in the architecture of all periods.[27]

Pūrṇa Ghaṭa at Bharhut

Two of the Bharhut reliefs decorating the chamfered edges of the railing pillars between the medallions, show the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa motif combined with lotus flowers and leaves rising from it. One or two pairs of Haṁsa birds are shown perching on the sprays (see Pls. IV-V). The Vase of Abundance is shaped as a pot with budding belly and sloping shoulder ornamented by fillet of disks, a flower-cord (*mekhalā*) round the neck, and projecting rim (Fig. 1). Three of the other similar chamfer-reliefs represent the Goddess Śrī seated or standing on a lotus flower supported by and issuing out of the beautifully



Fig. 2

embellished Pūrṇa Ghaṭa, and she is being bathed by two elephants on either side supported similarly by lotuses, with two inverted jars held in their trunk (Pls. I-III). In such compositions we see the delightful combination of both the Goddess and the Vase, of Prosperity and Abundance.

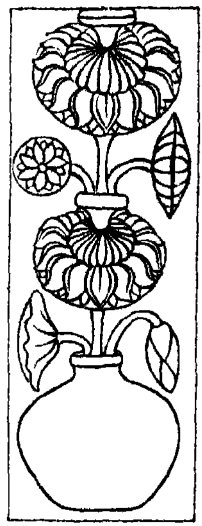


Fig. 3

Pūrṇa Ghaṭa at Sanchi

Similar illustrations will be found repeated at many times at Sanchi Stūpa in several varieties,[28] and testify to the high popularity of the motif. On the Sanchi Stūpas the motif is shown no less than twenty-two times, with a mass of lotus sprays and leaves ; in some cases in the form of long rising creepers. A few of the pleasing and typical ones are illustrated here, in Figs. 2-4.

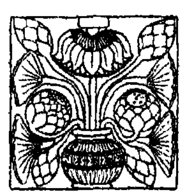


Fig. 4

""e could not fail here to make specific mention of an isolated pil' found from the Jamalpur site at Mathura, sho "ony Goddess Śrī Lakshmī standing on lotuses springing from a globular pot and might be descri-

bed as the completest possible treatment of the auspicious motif of the "Full Jar" (Pūrṇa Ghaṭa)[28a]. At the back of the pillar there is rising lotus plant with leaves, buds and flowers, and seated on the central leaf is a pair of peacocks with pendant tails; for the association of birds in pair with the Vase and Goddess, cf. *ante* p. 11 ; and *The Monuments of Sanchi*, Vol. I, pl. XI.

Śrī Lakshmī and Pūrṇa Ghaṭa at Mathura



Fig. 5

In the making of this beautiful and auspicious figure some great master of the Mathura School combined five elements to evolve a perfect form, viz. (1) Pūrṇa Ghaṭa with overflowing lotus buds, full blossomed flowers and leaves, (2) rising lotus stalks luxuriating with buds, flowers and leaves, similar in style to a Śrī-Vṛiksha (Tree of Life) with respective motifs, (3) Devī Śrī-Lakshmī, as Goddess Padmā-Śrī standing full stature with her feet resting on the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa

and her body in the midst of a lotus grove, (4) a pair of Haṁsas perched on the central lotus on the back, and (5) lastly the pose of nurishing with milk (*dugdhā-dhāriṇī*) as shown by Śrī pressing her breast with left hand, a feature taken from Bharhut.

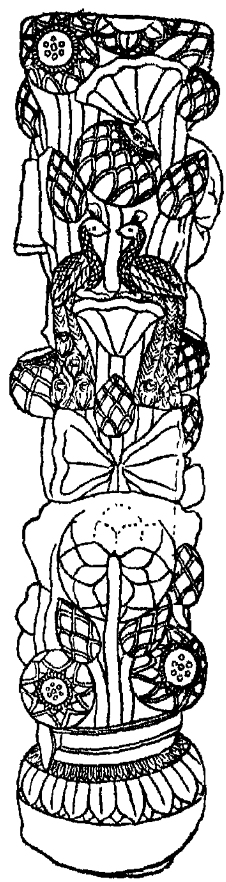


Fig. 6

Before considering other representations of the Brimming Jar elsewhere, the other aspect of the

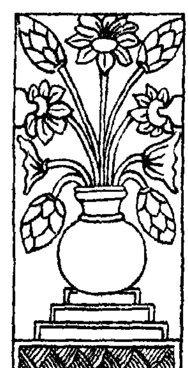
Treasure Vase in Indian Art

Kalaśa or Pot as Treasure-container may be illustrated from Indian Art. The famous Kalpadruma[29] capital from Besnagar (Pl. VI), usually dated in the 3rd century B.C., is the Wishing-Tree represented by a banyan with long pendant aerial roots, from which untold wealth in the shape of square pieces of money is drooping in much quantities that all the vessels placed below are full and overflowing. We find here shown alternatively four vessels full of money and four bags fastened with a band round the neck.

The open vessels are all different, a large shell, a full-blown lotus and a pot. Pl. VI illustrates the pot or *Kalasī* of treasure. The capital perhaps was dedicated to Kubera as the other two are clearly the Nidhis of him. He was truly the native god of wealth and the lord of Yakshas, who latter attending upon him were popular guardians of the Nidhis. We may here refer to the half-seen Yakshas in trees, offering pot and an object, probably illustrating the story of the Treasure, etc.[30], from Bharhut and Bodhgaya reliefs (Figs. 7-8). An excellent depiction of a Pūrṇa Ghaṭa overflown with coins, comes from Tamluk (anc. Tāmralipti), and is obviously to be dated to the Śuṅga period. It is an exquisitely carved terracotta plaque, a fine piece of art, with the design of Pūrṇa Ghaṭa exuding punch-marked square coins shown in rows covering its body. Faint traces of feet are seen on its mouth suggesting a figure of Lakshmī or Vasudhārā standing over it as the Wealth-muse, pleased, upon being invoked or propitiated, to allow the flow of wealth in favour of her votaries.[31] (Pl. XX).



Fig. 9



Sanchi Fig. 10

Kubera or Jambhala seated on the Kalaśa-seat, is a well-known iconographic feature which represents

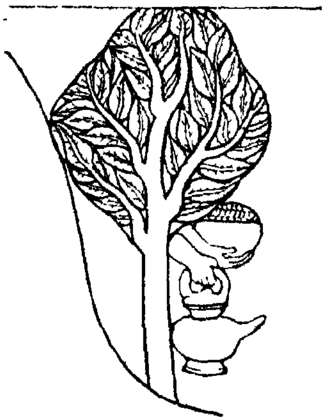


Fig. 7



Fig. 8

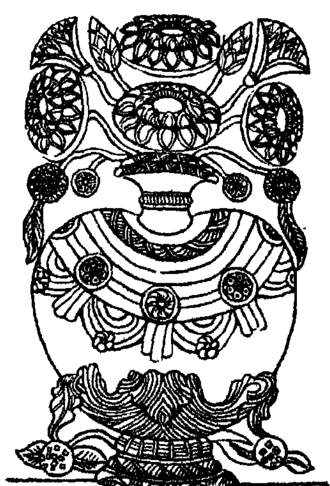


Fig. 14 Amaravati

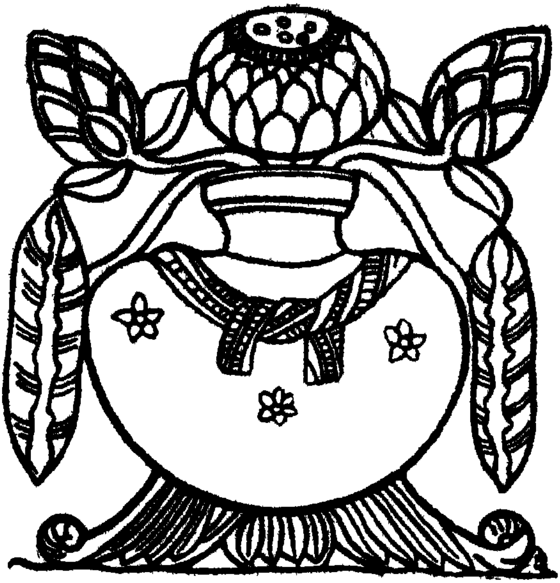


Fig. 11 Mathura



Fig. 13 Amaravati



Fig. 12 Begram

the treasure of the god.[32] Cf. p. 37, for the Pot and foliage under the seat of the Buddha.

Pūrṇa Ghaṭa at Other Centres

Figs. 2-4, 9-5 and Pls. VII-XIII illustrate the beautiful depictions of vegetating Full Vase, from Sanchi, Mathura, Kaushāmbī, Sarnath, Amaravati, Nagarjunikonda and Kapiśā. In the first group, Figs. 4, 9-14 and Pls. VIII-XI and XIII, we see the flowers and leaves spread and scattered over



Fig. 20 Amaravati



Fig. 21 Mathura



Fig. 22 Amaravati

the decorated pot on either side and above. Says Coomaraswamy : "As seen in outline or relief, the Pūrṇa Kalaśa is generally a globular vessel with a foot, and a constricted neck ; the body of the vessel is invariably encircled by a ribbon or other band,

tied with knots and serving the purpose of a magical 'fence' (see J. A. O. S., Vol. 48, p. 273); from the mouth there arises a spray or bunch of lotus flowers

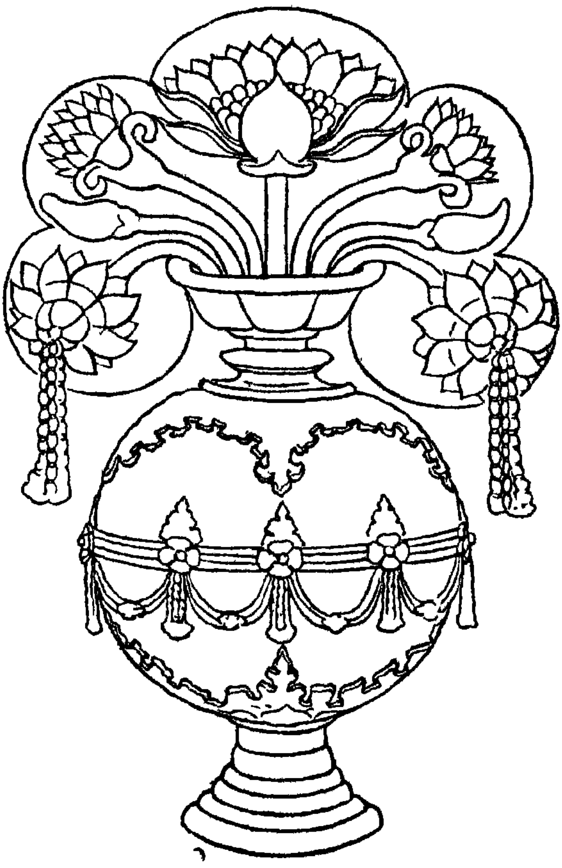


Fig. 15 Java



Fig. 16
Anuradhapur

or leaves hang over symmetrically on each side of the mouth, like the volutes of a palmette".

But the other decorative variety, represented by Figs. 3, 6 shows the foliage extended upwards straight dissolved in arabasque rising from the crock. In Figs. 2-3 and Pl. VII it will be seen that vase and vine are combined either vertically or horizontally and used as creeper motif. As Coomaraswamy has observed : " very commonly and especially when narrow vertical



Fig. 17
Anuradhapur, Ceylon

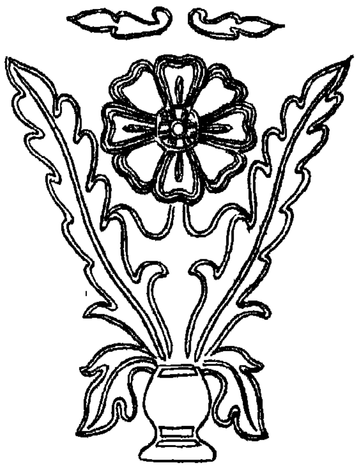


Fig. 18
Sinhalese embroidery

spaces are available for the reception of symbolic ornament, the vegetative element is extended upwards to a considerable height, either as a conventional candelabra-like tree, or as a long spray of lotus, bearing

flowers and leaves, and enclosing or framing birds and beasts in convolutions ".[33] (See Fig. 23). These may be further represented here from later art of India and Indonesia, by Figs. 15-18 and Pls. XXXI-II.

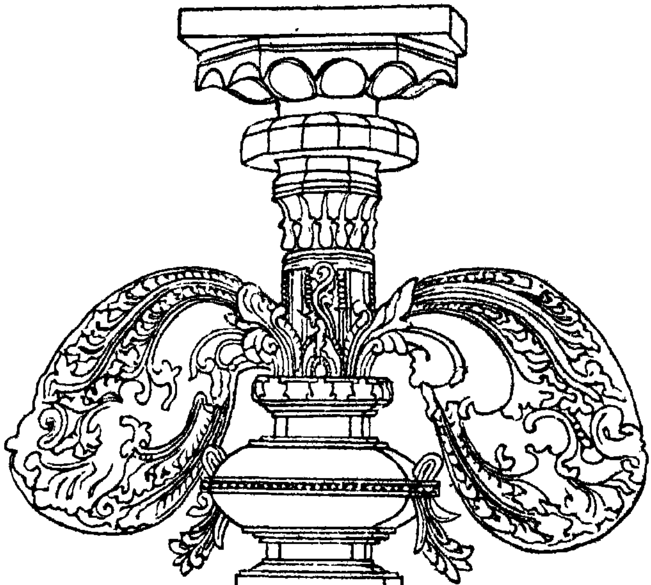


Fig. 19 Hampi

But as a design the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa saturated Indian art and architecture in several other forms and ways, and as the same authority remarked :

Pot and Foliage Capital and Base

" As an integral architectural motif it occurs in rich and varied forms as an essential part, generally the capital or the sub-capital, of monolithic or

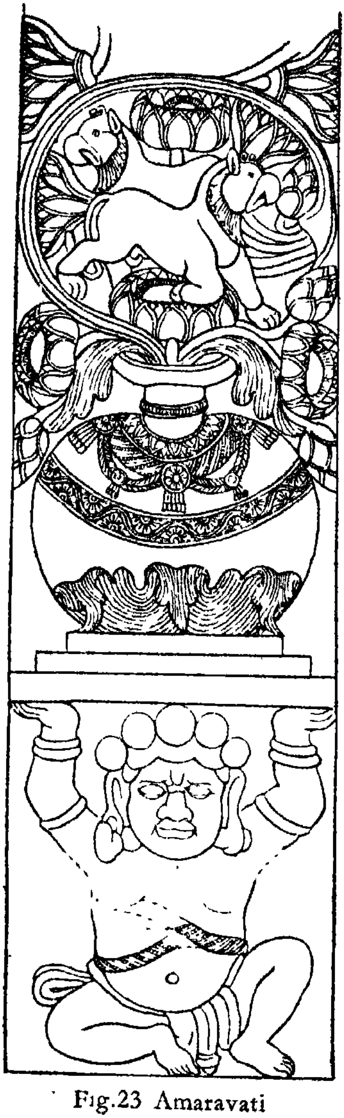


Fig.23 Amaravati

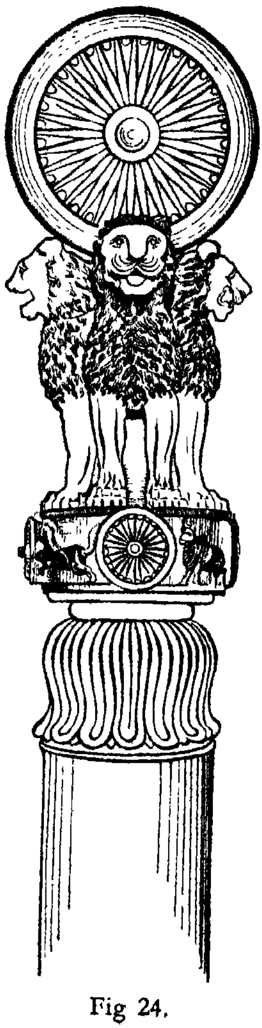


Fig 24.

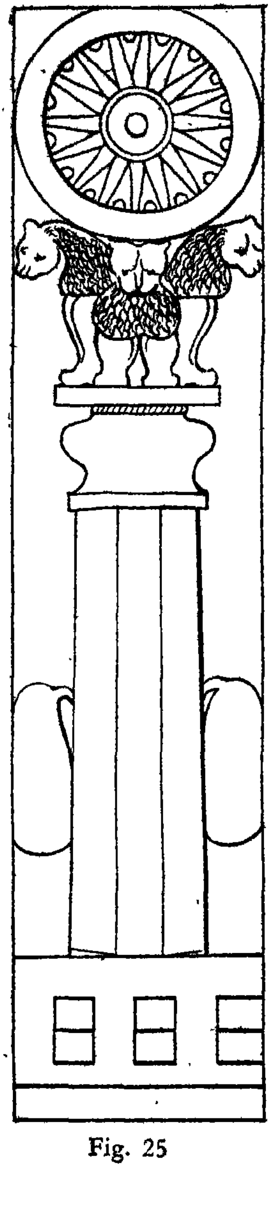


Fig. 25

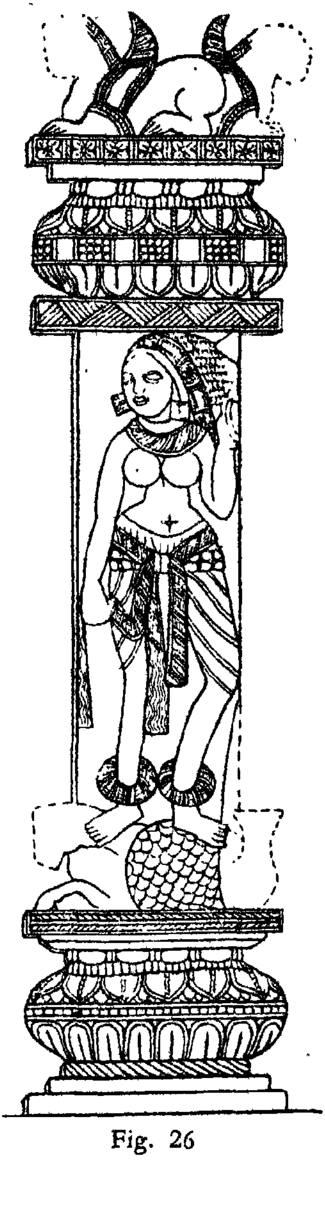


Fig. 26

structural columns, or as the support of a pilaster. It constitutes the well-known pot and foliage capital of medieval Indian architecture, a form that has generally

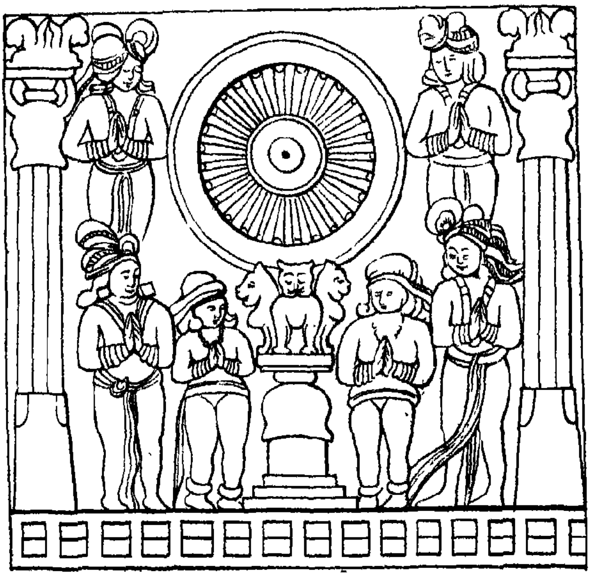


Fig. 27 Sanchi

been regarded as a development from the old "bell" capital, but while it is possible that the capital as such has originated in this way, this must not be thought of an origin of the motif itself, which is already fully developed in Śuṅga art".[34]

The so-called "bell-capital" of the Mauryan columns is nothing but a conventionalised form of Pot-and-Foliage, and the theory that it had evolved

from the practice of decorating posts and sacrificial stakes with Ghaṭa, has recently been propounded afresh by Prof. Agrawala. The value of the theory is further enhanced and is almost made, in his words,

Fig. 29

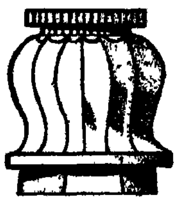


Fig. 28

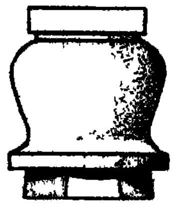


Fig. 30

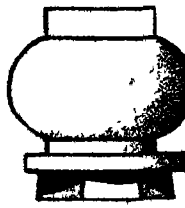
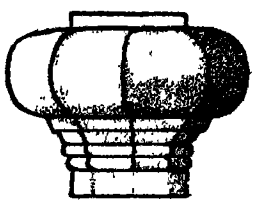


Fig. 31



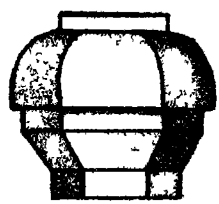


Fig. 32



Fig. 33



Fig. 34

After Combaz, *op.*, *cit.*, pl. III.

'certain by the form of the motif as interpreted during Śuṅgan times on the railing pillars found at Sarnath.

where the artists had represented and explained in relief the various component parts of the Aśokan lion-capital, the favourite and glorious emblem on the spot (Pl.XXI). That is also repeated so many times elsewhere in art and the composition of the pot on top (and also at base) is emphasised in these representations. For

Fig. 35

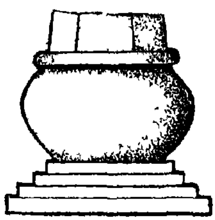
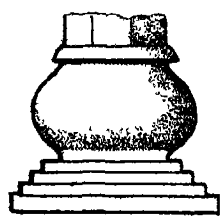


Fig. 36



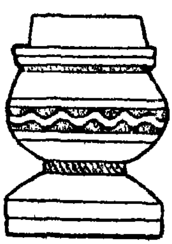


Fig. 37

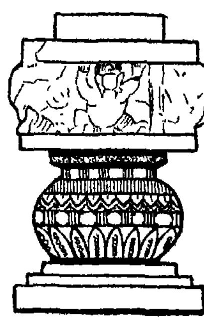


Fig. 39

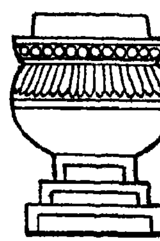


Fig. 38

a further elaboration readers are referred to the informative treatise *Chakradhvaja* by Prof. Agrawala on the problem of the origins of different component members of the Mauryan Pillars[35]. Here for our purpose, only a few illustrations may be given as

Pl. XXI from Sarnath, Figs. 25 and 27 from Sanchi, Pl. XXII and Fig. 40 from Mathura and Fig. 26 from Amaravati, and Fig. 19 from Hazāra Ramachandra temple, Hampi.

For the Ghaṭa motif as an architectural part of a pillar or pilaster instances are many and quite recognisable. A few assembled here as typical will be seen in Figs. 28-34, as capital, and 35-



Figs. 40-41 Mathura

39, as basement (taken from Combaz, Pl. XII). See also Fig. 39 x from Kanheri chaitya hall.

The Pūrṇa Ghaṭa motif was also adopted to decorate the finial of a Hindu temple, and it is actually called *kalaśa* placed on the *āmalaka śilā*.

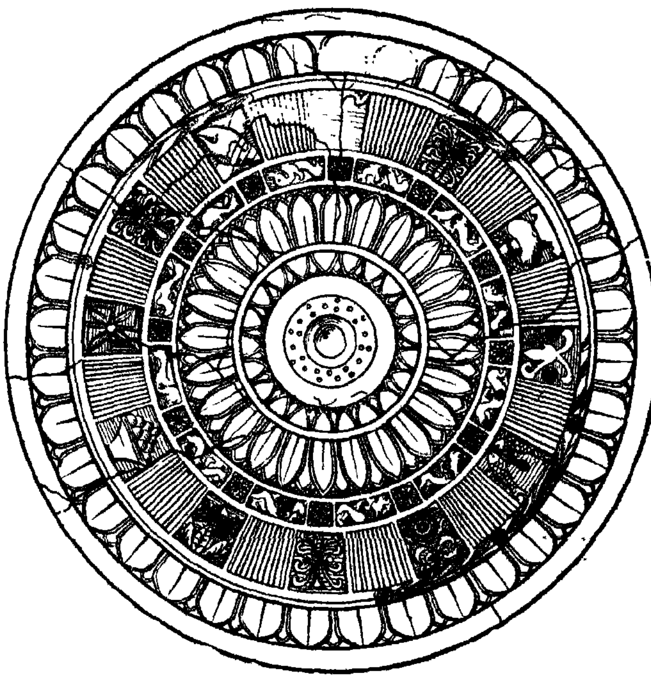


Fig. 42 Mathura

In some cases of the relief depictions an arch is shown springing out from a pair of such pots put

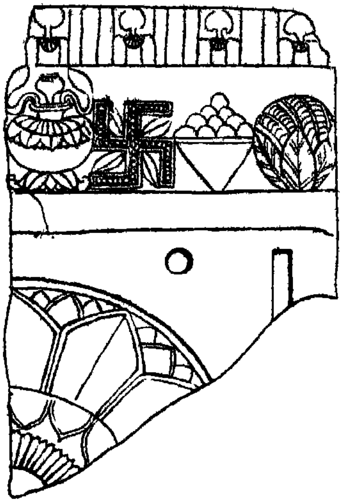


Fig. 43

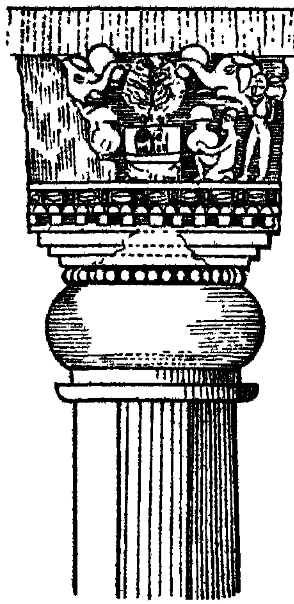
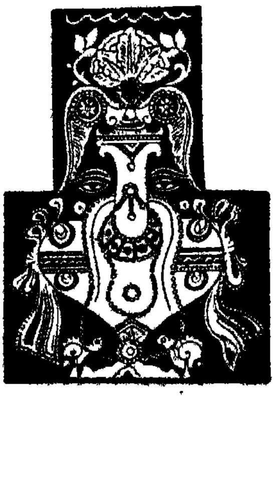


Fig. 39x



either side, as for example in Amaravati, Gandhara and Borobudur.[36]

Pūrṇa Ghaṭa in Jaina Art

In Jaina art the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa is one of the Auspicious Symbols, at Mathura (Pl. XIII), reckoned as eight Ashṭamaṅgala Chihnas[37], Figs. 40-43. It is also one of the fourteen

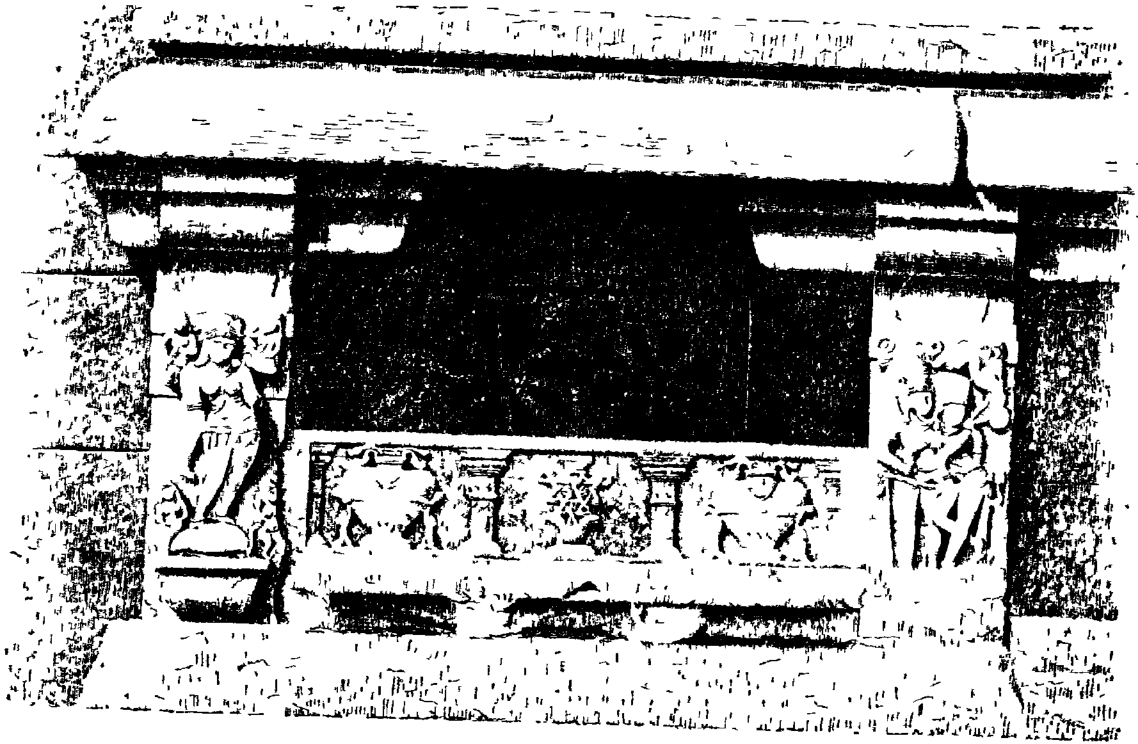


Fig 45 Lad Khan Temple, Aihole.

lucky dreams seen by Queen Triśalā, which are described in detail in Jaina texts[38], and represented in stone reliefs, on door-lintels of Jaina shrines, and in Jaina miniatures. (See Pls. XXXIII-XXXV and Fig. 44).

Pūrṇa Ghaṭa in Houses

It was the sacred and auspicious symbol during all periods and among all sects, and was universally employed in embellishing houses, shrines, monuments and cities. The charming conception of a house beautified with Full Vase, *Puṇṇaghaṭa-paṭimaṇḍita ghara*, is already made familiar in the Buddhist literature[39]. Bāṇa (*Harshacharita*, VII, 227) says of "a golden vessel adorned with sprays", set on the altar of a Brahmanical temple. As auspicious and inviting symbol of plenty, the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa placed on either side of the entrance doorway is also alluded to by Kālidāsa in his *Raghuvaṁśa*[40].

Pūrṇa Ghaṭa in Shrines

A pair of vessels may be seen placed flanking the entrance of the Deogarh shrine[41], where they are supported on the head of a Yaksha. On the facade of the front porch of the Lad Khan temple (Fig. 45) a pair of such Full Vases is shown and also in other Chalukyan temples[42]. Cf. also a Viragal relief (a memorial or 'Hero-Stone') from Mantur, found in a field, showing the feature[43].

An example may be cited for the motif before the cave-shrine at Junagarh[44]. Besides, they are commonly placed flanking the Stūpa entrances, as we see on Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda Stūpapaṭa reliefs, Pls. XVII-VIII[45]. On some of the Stūpapaṭas showing elaborate details of the extinct Stūpas at Amaravati and Nagarjunikonda, the beautiful decoration of a frieze of Pūrṇaghaṭas in a continuous row (*puṇṇaghaṭapaṅkti*) is carved with other bands of festoon, animal and triratna, etc.; see Pl. XV. A particularly happy representation of the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa with a temple may be seen on a Viragal Stone (or Hero Stone) from Mantur.

Pūrṇa Ghaṭa in Stūpas

An exquisitely carved marble from Nagarjunikonda[46] shows on one slab three friezes of triratnas, of Pūrṇaghaṭas, and of young men carrying a heavy garland[47]. (See Pl. XVI). It is probable that the pūrṇaghaṭa slabs showing the most delightful and pleasing representations of the Full Vase formed part of such actual Pūrṇa Ghaṭa friezes on the body of the domical curve of Stūpa, accompanied by some others[48]. See Pls. IX-X and VIII. The appropriate names for such panels carved with Pūrṇa Ghaṭa designs are supplied by the short labels to be found on some of them, viz. *Kalasapaṭa*, and *Puṇṇaghaṭakapaṭa*[49]. They must have been considered sacred and no doubt a thing of real beauty in themselves.

As such it is treated on numerous seals and also coins from the Gupta period which provide a good many conventionalised illustrations of the motif (see Pl. XIV). The row of Pūrṇa Ghaṭas decorated various places and spots of importance and sanctity, is fully supported by the *Kāliṅga Bodhi Jātaka* (479). There was installed a line of eight hundred Full Vases, made of silver and gold, filled with scented water, and covered with lotus flowers, round the Bodhi Tree[50].

In the *Maṇimekhalai*, Bk. I, on some particular festive occasion, order was given to decorate the city, the great royal roads, and the halls of faultless learning; to put in their proper places full jars, seed-vessels with budding sprouts, and statues holding lamps[51]. As the procession of the relic-car came out, the *Mahāvaṁsa* narrates, a thousand beautiful women from the city with adornment of fair Full Vessels (*suppuṇṇa ghaṭabbhūsāyo*) surrounded it[52]. The woman with a Full Vase, is mentioned under the name, *Pūrṇa-Kumbha-Kanyā*, as one of the auspicious symbols in the Lumbinī procession of Queen Māyā Devī[53]; for the earliest allusion to the motif, *ante* 9. These *Pūrṇa-Kumbha Kanyā* may be illustrated from Indian art in a sculptured relief at Amaravati, identified by Coomaraswamy as Nadī Devatās[54], and also Fergusson, *Tree and Serpent Worship*, Pl. XCIV, 3 and 4, showing both female and male figures holding

Pūrṇa Ghaṭas engaged worshipping the Bodhi Tree.



Fig 46 Ellora

Coomaraswamy observed that the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa was used in the worship of deities[55]. For this also

the above illustrations from Amaravati are no less significant. To them we add reliefs from Amaravati[56], Udayagiri[57], Ellora and Borobodur[58]. (See



Fig. 47 Borobodur, Java

Figs. 46-7). The fact that the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa has been regarded as the worshipful motif and employed invariably through the ages, need not be much emphasised here, to which numerous references could be collected from literature throughout. There

is the universal Indian custom of offering a full vessel to an honoured deity or guest in his worship or in his reception. Even today it is the first object to be consecrated in religious and domestic rituals and is the traditional emblem of sanctity and votive beauty.

In Iconography

As part of the iconographic scheme the Full Vase in its various forms will be seen connected with Śrī-Lakshmī, river goddesses (Pls. XXVII-III and the Frontispiece), Kubera, his consort Bhadrā another form of Lakshmī, Varuṇa (Fig. 48), Nāgas (Fig. 49) and other divinities.

But it should be "clearly distinguished from the plain jars sometimes carried by the early undiffer-



Fig. 48 Badami

entiated river goddesses and also from the *Amṛita* phial borne by Indra and some other deities though these similar vessels likewise are of necessity thought of as inexhaustible. It will be found at once that almost every important deity is said, in one place

or another, to possess a wish-granting talisman, either an inexhaustible bowl or productive jewel, or a tree of paradise that yield all kinds of treasures, or a wishing cow, or some other treasure. ...We have further the general and very significant fact of the drink or food of the gods (*soma*, *amrita* etc.) always conceived as contained in or drunk from a special vessel, e.g. the cup fashioned for the gods by Tvashtṛi, when the *soma* is represented in art, it is as a full vessel (*pūrṇaghaṭa*) and precisely such as a full or brimming vessel (*pūrṇaghaṭa*) is the commonest of all Indian symbols of plenty, and also a symbol of the waters in the plant style, is constantly represented as a source of vegetation."[59] Its "form is essentially that of a flower vase, combining a never failing source of water with an ever-living vegetation or tree of life. The type is of the widest distribution in later art, and it can always be identified by the symmetrically placed lateral overfalling leaves or flowers."[60]

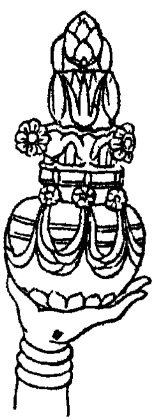


Fig. 49
Anuradhapur

In some cases, curiously enough, the typical Pūrṇa Ghaṭa is found installed under the seat of deities, like Kubera (*ante* 16); and the Buddha.[61] In the latter example it may have represented only the indicative sign of the worship by votaries, or

did have any iconographical significance, is not certain. Coomaraswamy interpreted some of the Śuṅgan bas-relief representations of the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa alone, as standing for the goddess Śrī-Lakshmī, but he was fully aware of the difficulty that no positive evidence could be adduced for it.

Foucher took it to be symbolic of the Nativity of Buddha; this theory is usually not given much recognition by scholars and does not hold good on obvious grounds. On several of the Borobodur panels the Pūrṇa Ghaṭa appears as framed inside a niche and being worshipped by the people. All probability is there in favour that the Full Vase represented symbolically the Buddha himself to whom such panels were dedicated.[62]

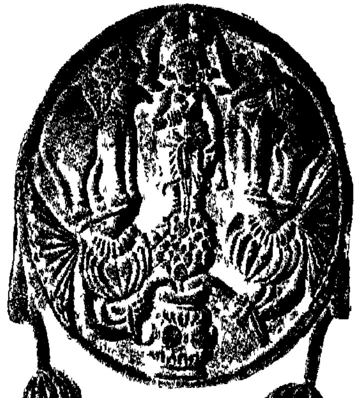
The Pūrṇa Ghaṭa is such a typical and beautiful motif as any could be. It is a perfect and most fascinating motif of Indian art. It sets a sample of Indian genius in formulating a meaningful symbol, much simple, readily available in every household, yet surcharged with high symbolism, an accepted and understood examplar of the fulness of Eternal Divine on the one hand and the human body on the other. It stands for beauty, art and life.



I



II



III



IV



V



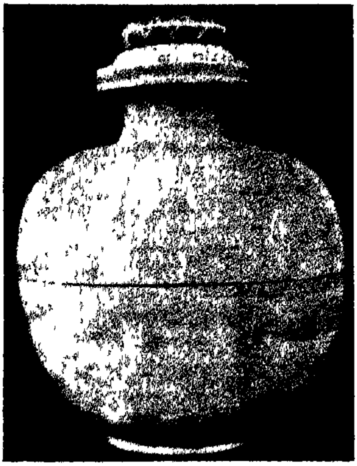
VII



VI



VIII



XII



XIII



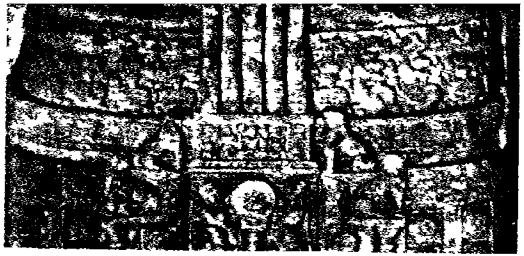
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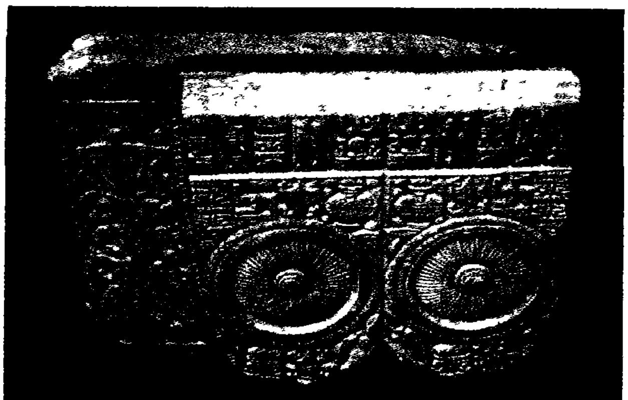
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XI



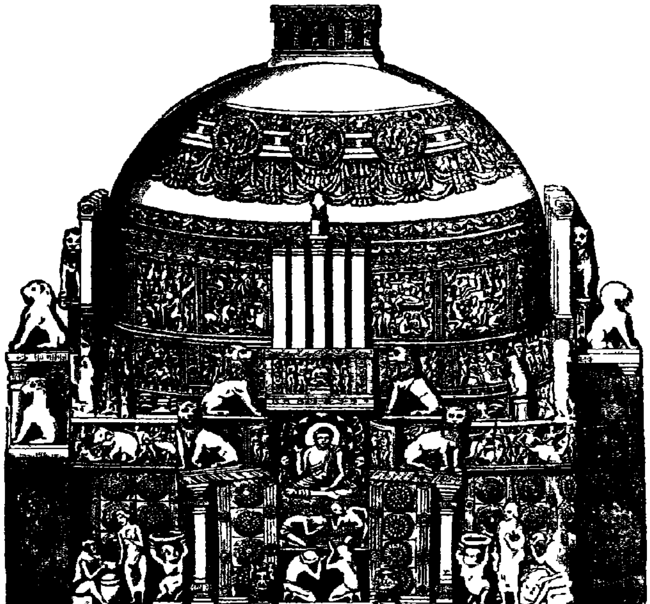
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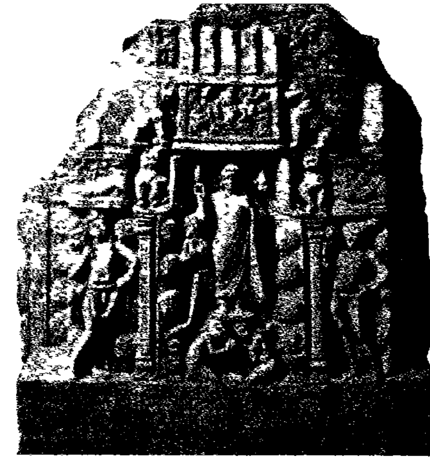
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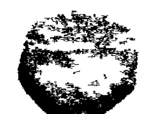
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XVII



XVIII



XIV



XX



XXV



XXVI



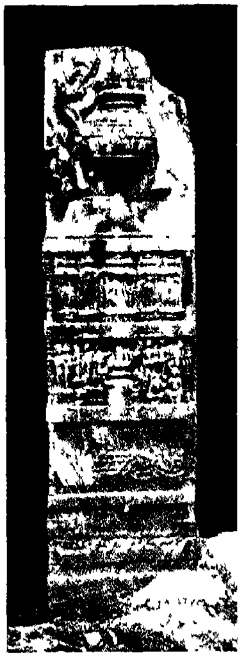
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XXII



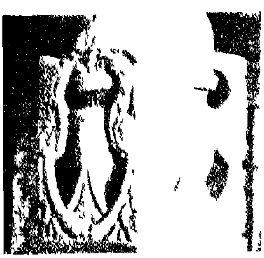
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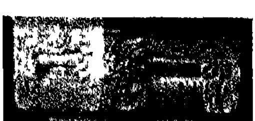
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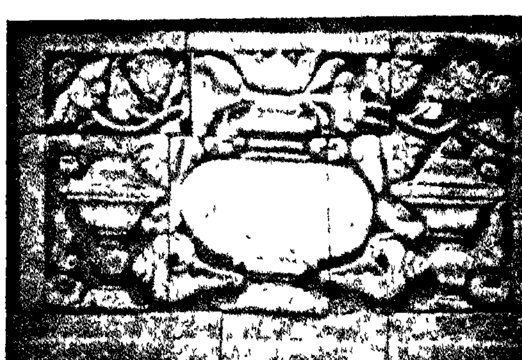
XXXI



XXIII



XXIV



XXXII



XXVII



XXVIII



XXXIII



XXXIV



XXXV

Appendix I

[From Coomaraswamy, *Yakshas*, Pt. II, *pp*. 63-4]

" Since we cannot expect to recover many actual documents of pre-Mauryan art in impermanent material, particularly wood, it will be pertinent to call attention to the Mesopotamian analogy of the

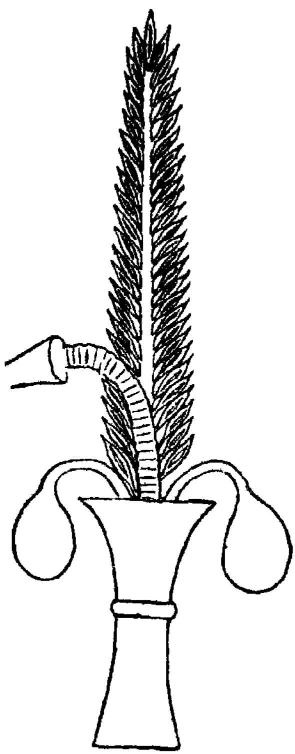


Fig. 51

Flowing vase, which gradually developed into a vase of vegetation; for a similar evolution may have taken place in India. In the representations of this " merveilleux symbole qui était comme le *Saint-Graal* de l'épopée chaldéenne," to quote the words of one of the greatest scholars of Sumerian antiquities, there can be recognised an "evolutionary" and more or less chronological sequence of types. At first there are plain globular vases, held by standing or seated personages, one hand below, the other on the vase (Heuzey, *loc. cit.*, pl. V). Then comes the typical and very beautiful form, that of a vase

from which spring two undulating streams of water, to right and left; these are held by male or female genii of the waters, represented in sculpture or metal-work, e.g., the beaker of Gudea[1], or by a divinity represented on seal cylinders, e.g., Heuzey, *loc. cit.*, *p.* 41, and Ward, *Seal cylinders*, Nos. 286, 650,

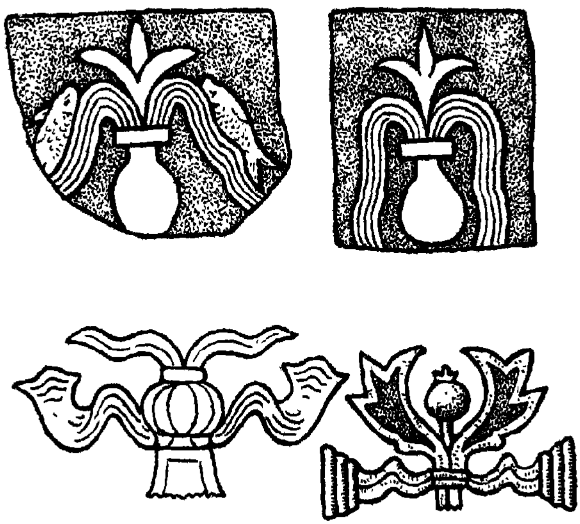


Fig. 52-5

After Combaz, *L'Inde et l' Orient classique*, Vol. II. 121. From Tello, Sceau de Goudea, Bamiyan and Kish respectively.

etc., in some cases numbers of such flowing vases may be arranged symmetrically to form an all-over

1 Unger, No. 47.

design (Fig. 50). Occasionally a small vegetative sprout is shown between the two rising streams, and this later develops into an ear of corn. Sometimes four streams are represented; very often accompanied by fish, perhaps as a symbol of Ishtar, or simply to emphasise the sense of water. Finally we get a vase of a somewhat different shape, having a tall central sprout and two lateral volutes, which seem to represent the original streams of water (Ward, No. 203; here Fig. 51); these vases are offerings set before a deity (Heuzey, *p.* 163; Unger, No. 59, Ward, Nos. 421, 1235). We thus arrive at a form at least analogous to the Indian, inasmuch as it is a vase of vegetation, with symmetrical over-falling volute-like elements on either side; and it may be suggested that perhaps the Indian form has been developed from an older type of actually flowing vase, analogous to that of the early Chaldean art."

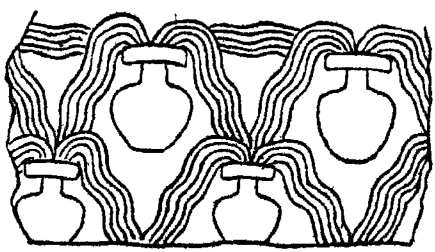


Fig. 50

List of Half-tone Plates

I-V. From Bharhut Railing-pillars. C. 150 B. C. Photo : ASI.

VI. Kalpadruma Capital, from Besnagar; now Indian Museum, Calcutta. 3rd cent. B. C. ASI.

VII. Carved pillar from Kaushambi. From *Indian Archaeology—a review*, 1956-7, pl. XXXVIIIa. 1st cent. B. C.

VIII. Amaravati Stūpa. Carved panel. 2nd cent. B. C. ASI.

IX-X. Amaravati marbles. 3rd cent. In the collection of RB. S. T. Srinivasagopalachariar. Reproduced here from *Bhārata Kaumudī*, figs. 1 and 2 facing *p.* 954, accompanying Sivaramamurti's article. They show Śankha and Padma *nidhis* on a Full Vase, respectively.

XI. Begram ivory. From Hakin. 2nd cent. A.D.

XII. Nagarjunikonda Stūpa. Andhra-Ikshvaku period. ASI.

XIII. Carved roundel. From Mathura, now Boston Museum. Courtesy : Boston M.

XIV. Gupta coin of Chandragupta II. Reverse. Allan, *p.* lxxxviii (Intro.), on pl. XI 23, described on *p.* 60. Courtesy : British M.

For seals showing Pūrṇa Ghaṭas, from Basarh—

ASI-AR. 1903-4, pls. XLI, 20, 21, 25, 33, XLII and XL, 5.

XV-VI. From Nagarjunikonda. ASI.

XVII. From Amaravati. ASI.

XVIII. From Nagarjunikonda. ASI.

XIX. Buddha-pada. From Nagarjunikonda. ASI.

XX. Terracotta plaque from Tamluk. 2nd-1st cent. B.C. ASI.

XXI. Sarnath. 1st cent. B.C. ASI.

XXII. From a relief, Mathura. ASI.

XXIII. Indra Sabhā. Ellora. 8th cent. India Office Photograph, here reproduced from *Yakshas*, pl. 17.

XXIV. Verandah of Cave XXIV. Ajanta. Courtesy : Same.

XXV-VI. Mathura.

XXVII-VIII. Life-sized terracotta goddesses. Gaṅgā and Yamunā. From Śiva temple, Ahichchhatra. Late Gupta period. ASI.

XXIX. Goddess, Kulu. In a temple dated 1428 A.D. From *Yakshas*, pl. 23.

XXX. A Hero Stone or Viragal, Mantur. From Cousens, *Chalukyan Temples*, pl. CLIV.

XXXI. Tracery window, South India. From *Yakshas*, pl. 17. 18th cent.

XXXII. Carved panel, Chandi Sewu, Java. From Coom., *Yakshas*, pl. 17. Early 9th cent.

XXXIII-V. Jaina Miniatures. Showing the 14 Dreams of Triśalā, and Pūrṇa Ghaṭas used as decorative design. C. fifteenth century. ASI.

NOTES

1 These terms can be, and have been translated into English in several ways, namely : the Full Vase, Full Jar, Full Pot, Brimming Jar, Vase of Plenty, or the Plentiful Vessel etc. In its Indian names, the word *Pūrṇa* donotes fulness, plenum, abundance or plenty; and the second part of the compound is the word for vessel or jar.

2 See Agrawala, V. S., "Pūrṇa Kalaśa", *Roopa Lekha*, XXII, No. 1, *p*. 22.

3 Coomaraswamy, A. K., *Yakshas*, Pt. II, *p*. 61.

4 Agrawala, *loc. cit.*, *p*. 22; *Studies in Indian Art*. Art. *p*. 43.

5 Agrawala, "Pūrṇa Kumbha or the Full Vase" JUPHS. Vol. XVII, Pt. 1, *pp*. 1-2. See also *Ṛigveda Translations* by Griffith and Wilson.

6 See *Vedic Index*, II, *pp*. 476-7.

7 "Kosha, Sadhastha, Vana, Droṇa are all terms used for Soma vessels, ..." *Vedic Index*, II, *pp*. 476-7. Also for *kalaśa* in this context, *Ṛigveda*, IX. 60. 3; 75.3; 81.2; 86.16; 19. 22; 97.22; etc. Hymn IX. 96 uses Droṇa, Chamū, Kosha for Soma jar.

8. Agrawala, JUPHS. XVII, Pt. 1, *p*. 2.

9 RV. IV. 27.5.

10 Agrawala, *loc. cit.*, *p*. 2.

11 *Dhishanā*, RV. I. 96.1; I. 102.1, 7 etc.; *Dhishaṇānām*, RV. V. 69.2.

12 Johannsen, K. F., *Uber die altindische Gottin Dhiṣaṇā...*, *pp.* 26-28.

13 Of RV. IX. 62. The actual word used in the 19th verse for "all glories" is *Viśvā śriyaḥ* :

Āviśan Kalaśaṁ suto viśvā arshannabhi śriyaḥ.

We have given above only relevant portions, based on Griffith's *Translation*, modified here and there.

14 Agrawala, *Roopa Lekha*, XXII, No. 1, *p.* 23.

15 Coomaraswamy, *loc. cit.*, *pp.* 62-3.

16 VS. 19.87.

17 Agrawala, *loc. cit.*, *pp.* 23.-4.

18 AV. XIX. 53.3.

19 *Pūrṇaḥ kumbho' adhikāla āhita staṁ vai paśyāmo bahudhā nu santem.*

20 Agrawala, *loc. cit.*, *pp.* 23-4.

20a *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*

22 AV. III. 12.

23 See also AV. XI. 8.24, for a like picture of an Indian Household or the human body wherein 'Enjoyments, pleasures and delights, gladness and rapturous ecstasies;

Laughter and merriment, dance and play have come to reside'.

24 *Yakshas*, II, *p.* 61; "Śrī-Lakshmī", *Eastern Art*, I (3), *p.* 183.

25 *Yakshas*, II, *p.* 61.

26 *Infra*, 36-7.

27 Coomaraswamy, "Śrī-Lakshmī", *Eastern Art*, I (3), *p.* 183.

28. For Abhisheka Lakshmī at Sanchi, see Marshall, *Monuments of Sanchi*, pls. 11, 24, 25, 30, 41, 44, 56, 87, 88, 90, 98, 102. But only in two cases the Ghaṭa is shown under the Goddess; which references are indicated above by italics.

28a Coomaraswamy, *loc. cit.*; also HIIA., *p.* 65.

29 Coomaraswamy, *Yakshas*, II, *p.* 72; Cunningham, *Archaeological Reports*, Part I.

30 *Dhammapada*, Aṭṭhakathā, I, 204, see Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends*, I, 274.

31 Ramachandran, T. N., "*Tamluk,*" *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. XIV, 3, *pp.* 232-4.

32 Cf. Ramachandran, *Goli Stūpa*, pl. vi (2); Marshall, MOS., pl. 126 (h); Banerjea, *Development of Hindu Iconography*, pl. XLVII(2).

33 *Yakshas*, II, *p.* 62.

34 *Ibid. p.* 63.

35 Agrawala, *Chakradhvaja—the Wheel-Flag of India.*

36 Ananta Cave, Orissa, Bacchofer, *Early Indian Sculpture*, pl. 133; Ingholt, *Gandharan Art in Pakistan*, Figs. 78, 407; *Borobudur*, II, XV, 30.

37 Shah, U.P., *Studies in Jaina Art*, 'Ashṭamaṅgala', *pp.* 109-112;

38 *Ibid.*, "Auspicious Dreams", *pp.* 105-8; *Yakshas*, II, *p.* 61.

39 *Dhammapada*, Aṭṭhakathā, I. 147 Agrawala, JUPHS. XVII, Pt. I, *p.* 4.

40 Sivaramamurti, *Mirrors Of Indian Culture*, *p.* 4.

41 Vats, Gupta Temple at Deogarh, pl. IX.

42 Cousens, *Chalukyan Temples*, pl. XIV.

43 *Chalukyan Temples*, pls. CLIV-V.

44 Burgess, *Report on the Antiquities of Kathiawar and Kachh*, 1874-5, pl. XVII.

45 Longhurst, *Nagarjunikonda Stūpas*, pl. XI b. c. d. See also Ramachandran, *Nagarjunikonda*.

46 Longhurst, *loc. cit*, pl. XIV, d. Here Pl. XVI.

47 AR-ASI, 1930-4, pl. XXXIX e. See Barret, *Sculptures from Amaravati in the British Museum*, *p*. 38. Fn. 56.

48 *Ibid*. pl. XXXI, c.

49 Agrawala, *Indian Art*, *p*. 285.

50 *Rājā aṭṭhasatamatte suvaṇṇarājataghaṭe gandhodakapūre niluppala-hatthakādipaṭimaṇḍite mahābodhiṁ parikkhipitvā puṇṇaghaṭa-pantiṁ nāma thāpāpesi*, Fausboell, *Jātakas*, IV, *p*. 229.

51 *Yakshas*, II, *p*. 61, Fn. 2.

52 XXXI. 40.

53 *Lalita Vistara*, Vaidya ed., *p*. 71.

54 *Yakshas*, II, pl. 19, 2; Barret, *loc. cit.*, pl. XXV.

55 *Yakshas*, *p*. 62.

56 *Ibid*., pl. 26(2).

57 Agrawala, *Gupta Art*, pl. V, Fig. 7.

58 *Borobudur*, II, XXVI (51), XXXVIII (76), XXXIX (76) in worship; see Fig. 47; for reception of guest, IV (B. VIII).

59 *Yakshas*, II, p. 40.

60 *Ibid*.

61 Ingholt, *loc. cit.*, pls. XV (1), XXIV (2).

62 *Borobudur*, II, XXXI (62); III, XVII (35-36); IV (B), XVI (74).

